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ABSTRACT

This overview report of the site visit evaluations for the Minnesota Council on Quality Education (CQE) Early Childhood and Family Education programs provides an aggregate picture of the total CQE effort. The purpose of the evaluation effort was to judge the quality of the CQE programs. The first part of this report presents the results of those judgments. Based on criteria which focused on central program components, the overall quality of CQE programs was judged to be quite high. Twenty-one quality criteria were applied to each program. For 11 of the 21, all programs observed were judged to meet the basic level of quality. No standard had fewer than 83 percent of all programs judged as meeting the basic quality level for that criterion. Findings related to parent education, program component for children, and home-based family education are discussed. Additional issues that regularly emerged during the site visits such as (1) key elements in a quality program, (2) parent-child interaction time, (3) program development, (4) information sharing and (5) self-evaluation are explored. Building on these five topics, the report concludes with a series of recommendations that constitute an agenda for discussions about future directions for CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs. (Author/RH)

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THE QUALITY OF CQE EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAMS: AN EVALUATION PERSPECTIVE

A Report Submitted to the
Minnesota Council on Quality Education

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EVALUATION OF PROGRAM QUALITY

Introduction

This report is an evaluation of the quality of the Council on Quality Education (CQE) Early Childhood and Family Education program. In 1978, there were twenty-two CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs. The programs were located throughout Minnesota. Each program is locally developed and locally operated. Thus, there is a great deal of variation among programs. At the same time, there are basic components and patterns which cut across the twenty-two programs. The major focus of this evaluation is on the common elements that relate to the overall quality of these CQE programs.

Development of the Quality Criteria

What constitutes a high quality program? In the spring of 1978, the twenty-two directors of the CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs assembled to tackle this question. In a full-day workshop facilitated by Minnesota Center for Social Research director, Michael Patton, the program directors undertook the task of establishing standards of excellence. Working at times alone, at times in small groups, and coming together as a full group to make final decisions, the program directors worked at developing quality criteria.

As proposed criteria came before the group from individuals and small groupings of individuals, some specific criteria were combined into more global dimensions; other criteria were divided into more specific and concrete dimensions; some criteria were dropped altogether; and new criteria were added over the course of the day. In the end, the program directors settled on 21 major criteria for program quality.

Following the workshop, the 21 criteria were revised by the evaluator to fit a common format. The revised criteria were then circulated for comment and still further revision. Program directors and local program staff reacted to the criteria; the CQE and its Advisory Task Force reacted to the criteria; and CQE staff examined and participated in revising the criteria. Over the course of the summer of 1978, the quality criteria went through three revisions before the final list was compiled and organized to serve as the focus for this evaluation.

The Quality Criteria

Several points can be made about the quality criteria. First, these quality criteria are not goals in the usual sense. Program goals typically define the basic expectations of a program. In this case, program directors were asked to go beyond the basic expectations to specify ideals of quality. In short, this statement of quality criteria represents an attempt to specify the conditions for excellence, not simply minimal conditions for basic program functioning.

A second and closely related point is that the statement of quality criteria represents an effort to take the idea of "quality" seriously. "Quality" is an elusive concept. Definitions of quality certainly vary for different people. Moreover, few programs are willing to specify high quality standards because they prefer to be held accountable only for minimum level functioning, not for excellence. However, in this case, previous evaluations* of the CQE Early Childhood and Family Education program had already established that programs met basic implementation criteria. The challenge was to move beyond minimum standards to examine higher level standards of quality. Thus, it seemed appropriate to both the evaluator and the program staff that it was time to take seriously the issue of quality.

* Available on request from the Minnesota Council on Quality Education.

A third point concerns the format used for writing the quality criteria. The quality statements are not tightly worded goals. The statements are not written in behavioral or measurable terms. In developing the quality criteria, an attempt was made to separate issues of specification from issues of measurement. This means the program directors were asked not to worry about whether or not their ideals were measurable, but only to worry about stating those ideals in words. Once the ideals were written, it was possible then, and only then, to deal with the issue of how to measure those ideals. This represents a departure from many goals clarification processes used in evaluation research. The issue of measurement will be dealt with in a later section.

A fourth point concerns the scope of the quality criteria. Quality criteria were not developed for all components of the CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs. The basic focus of these quality criteria are on the most central program components: parent education and center-based children's activities. Limited time and resources made it impossible to deal with other CQE program components in this particular evaluation effort. Therefore, quality criteria were not developed for the library component, the adolescent pre-parenting component, and the health screening component.

A fifth point is that the quality criteria which provide the focus for this evaluation represent only those criteria which generated agreement among program directors and which were specified by program directors as being of high priority. Other criteria were considered, but dropped, either because program directors could not agree about the importance of those other criteria, or because they did agree that those others were of less importance than the criteria herein specified.

A sixth and final point is that these criteria focus on program implementation, not program outcomes. Outcomes evaluation would require a longitudinal research design and greater levels of funding for the evaluation than were available in this instance. In addition, the CQE and its Task Force decided to concentrate first on determining the extent to which quality programs have been implemented before attempting more complex outcomes evaluation. Thus, the quality criteria state the factors and conditions considered necessary to establish and maintain excellence in program operations.

The Measurement of Program Quality

The data for this report were gathered during site visits to the 22 CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs. During each site visit, the evaluators conducted interviews with key informants and made direct observations of program activities. As Table 1 shows, a variety of people were interviewed during the site visits. All program directors were interviewed. At least one parent educator was interviewed at each site. The person responsible for the children's program was also interviewed at each site. In addition, program aides, secretaries, advisory board members, principals, nurses, and elementary or kindergarten teachers were also interviewed. As Table 1 shows, in many cases the same person occupied more than one of these positions. In all, 159 interviews were conducted during the site visits.

Table 1 also shows the activities that were observed during the site visits. Thirty-five parent sessions were observed; twenty-four children's activity sessions were observed; on twenty-three occasions, parent-child interaction times were observed; nine home visits were directly observed; and four advisory board meetings were observed.

Because of scheduling difficulties, sudden changes in the weather, and unanticipated program changes it was clearly not possible to observe all the activities of all twenty-two programs. Site visits at some programs were less intense than those at other programs. The evaluators had 28 working days to make all 22 site visits. Many of the site visits involved considerable travel around the state of Minnesota. In addition, the evaluators became more skilled and efficient in conducting the site visits as they gained experience over time. Therefore, the emphasis in this report is on the agregation of site visits rather than upon the results of individual site visits.

Table 1
Summary of Data Sources
from Site Visits

INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS	
Parent Educators/Coordinators	13
Children's Teachers/Coordinators	2
Parent Educators	15
Parents	15
Directors	11
Children's Teachers	19
Parent Educators/Children's Teachers	3
Aides and Assistants	7
Secretaries	10
Advisory Board Members/Community Representatives	4
Advisory Board Members/Parents	25
Principals and Superintendents, School Liaisons, and Community Ed. Coordinators	23
Home Visitors	8
School Nurses	2
Kindergarten and Elementary Teachers	2
Total	159
OBSERVATIONS	
Parent Discussion Sessions	35
Children's Activity Sessions	24
Parent/Child Interaction Times	23
Advisory Board Meetings	4
Home Visits	9
Total	95

That is, the results of the site visits as reported in this evaluation represent a general overview of the quality of CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs. While time and resource constraints meant that the data from some individual programs may be incomplete, the overall picture that emerges when the individual site visits are combined is relatively reliable and accurate.

The evaluation consists of two processes at each site. The first process involves the gathering of basic descriptive information from interviews and observations. The second process involves making judgments about the meaning of those descriptions, in particular making judgements about the extent to which programs meet the quality criteria. The making of such judgments is inevitably subjective. For that reason, CQE members placed particular importance upon the training and credentials of the site visit evaluators. The mandate from CQE was to include on the site visit team expertise in early childhood development, parent education, and evaluation research. To meet that demand, a team of four evaluators was assembled, two men and two women. The evaluation staff included two members trained primarily in early childhood education with experience in parent education, and two educational evaluators with experience in parent education and qualitative evaluation methods.

The site visit team began with a pilot site visit to a local early childhood and parent education program that is not part of the CQE program. In training the team, primary emphasis was placed upon separating description and judgment. Each evaluator had responsibility during the site visit for gathering descriptive information about selected criteria, and then all members of a site visit team would discuss those descriptions in making judgments about the extent to which quality criteria had been attained.

This approach to conducting site visits relies heavily upon the expertise of the evaluators. This type of evaluation approach was requested by CQE staff in order to increase the extent to which immediate feedback could be provided to local programs. Thus, the site visits had two purposes: (1) to gather information that could be used in constructing an overview description of the quality of CQE programs; and (2) to provide feedback to local programs that could be used for program improvement.

The judgments reported in this evaluation, then, are clearly subjective. The results represent the considered opinions of early childhood, parent education, and evaluation specialists who had the additional advantage of seeing all 22 programs. The actual data upon which judgments were made are also a part of this report. Each site has received a detailed description of the interview and observation results. Examples of those descriptions are contained in this overview, but the complete data for all site visits consists of over 200 pages of detailed description and comments. This overview represents a distillation of those interviews and observations from all 22 sites, with emphasis upon basic patterns of quality running across and through the CQE programs.

It should be noted in considering the methodology for this evaluation that the evaluation team acted with complete autonomy and independence in gathering and analyzing the data. Thus, while the data are necessarily and appropriately subjective, the data are also unbiased in the sense that care was taken to make sure that none of the members of the site visit teams had prior knowledge of, vested interest in, or preconceptions about the local programs they visited.

Before turning to the results of this study, one other point should be made. This report represents only one of many evaluative efforts undertaken

by CQE. The complete evaluation of the CQE program includes systematic program operations data collected by CQE, parent interview findings, and local program evaluation. The purpose of this report is to add the observations and judgments made possible through systematic site visits to all 22 programs to other evaluative information about CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs.

DATA ON PROGRAM QUALITY

The basic findings on program quality are summarized in Table 2. The data indicate that, overall, the CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs are achieving a high level of quality. For eleven of the twenty-one criteria, 100% of the programs meet the basic quality standard.* For the remaining ten criteria, at least 83% of the programs attain the basic level of quality on each criterion. Table 3 shows how many programs attained the quality criterion for each of the twenty-one quality statements. Table 3 is a reference guide permitting quick access to specific criteria that were attained by all programs, as well as identifying criteria that constituted problems for some programs.

It may be helpful to examine the quality patterns in greater detail. Table 4 arranges the quality criteria in rank order to show which elements of the CQE programs rated highest in quality throughout the state. Six criteria had mean scores of 2.0 or better on the five-point scale. (The lower the mean, the higher the overall quality.)

Statewide, then, the data show that the criteria of highest quality are: (1) providing positive reinforcement to parents; (2) coordination with other community services; (3) providing parents with opportunities for personal growth and development; (4) program organization; (5) providing appropriate materials and activities for children; and (6) providing learning opportunities for parents in the centers.

By contrast, the criteria with the lowest overall statewide ratings were: (21) reflection of parent and home environment in center-based children's activities; (20) parent participation in selecting children's materials and activities; (19) attractiveness of program environment; (18) advisory board

*3.0 on a scale of 1 (high) to 5 (low).

decision-making role; and (17) parent involvement in program planning and implementation. It should be noted that the overall mean for each of these relatively lower quality criteria is still well above the 3.0 level which represents basic quality implementation. Thus, these criteria are ranked low only in comparison to the other criteria. In absolute terms, these criteria are still being generally implemented at a high level of quality.*

It is interesting to note that the highest ranked criteria basically concern program content, curriculum, and organization. By way of contrast, the criteria most in need of improvement concern parent and community input and involvement in program decision-making. In a later section of this report, the issue of parent input will be discussed in greater detail and recommendations for increasing parent involvement in program decision-making will be discussed.

This section of the report has presented a summary of the ratings on program quality. The data indicate that overall the 22 CQE programs are attaining high levels of program quality. The next sections present summaries of the descriptive data gathered on major program components: center-based parent activities, home visits, center-based children's activities, and parent-child interactions. The judgments and ratings analyzed in Tables 2-5 were derived from the qualitative descriptions discussed in the following sections.

* In using this scale, the raters treated it as an ordinal scale, much like a grade point average. The computed means are meant only to be indicative and illustrative of overall patterns. Other parametic uses of these data might be inappropriate.

TABLE 2

CQE EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM

SITE VISIT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Components of Program Quality	Program meets criterion to an exemplary extent 1	2	Basically meets quality criterion, could be improved 3	4	Does not meet quality criterion, inadequate 5	Mean
I. COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND INPUT						
1. Extensive Personal Outreach to Parents with Pre-School Age Children	17.4%	56.5%	26.1%	0%	0%	2.09 (N=23)*
2. The program is planned to meet the specific needs of the area being served	13.0%	60.9%	17.4%	4.3%	4.3%	2.26 (N=23)*
3. The advisory Board plays an active decision-making role in program planning, implementation, and development.	17.4%	34.8%	47.8%	0%	0%	2.30 (N=23)*
4. Parents are actively involved in program planning, implementation, and development.	13.0%	56.5%	21.7%	4.3%	4.3%	2.30 (N=23)*
5. The early childhood family education program is coordinated with other community services and resources	30.4%	60.9%	8.7%	0%	0%	1.78 (N=23)*

*23 programs were observed because one program had two operating sites, each of which was rated separately.

TABLE 2 Continued

CQE EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM

SITE VISIT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Components of Program Quality	Program meets criterion to an exemplary extent		Basically meets quality criterion, could be improved		Does not meet quality criterion, inadequate	Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
II. PARENT EDUCATION						
1. The principles of child development and parenting are taught by using parent's own concrete experiences.	18.2%	59.1%	22.7%	0%	0%	2.05 (N=22)*
2. Parents are positively reinforced to affirm and enhance their positive feelings about themselves and their parent role.	31.8%	59.1%	9.1%	0%	0%	1.77 (N=22)*
3. The program will nurture and enhance the family system by emphasizing and providing opportunities for personal growth and on-going adult development.	31.8%	54.5%	13.6%	0%	0%	1.82 (N=22)*
4. Educational materials concerning early childhood and parenting are available and used as a resource.	13.0%	65.2%	17.4%	4.3%	0%	2.13 (N=22)*

*This figure represents the number of sites in which this criterion was observed. In some sites not all criteria could be observed during a particular site visit.

TABLE 2 Continued
COE EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM

SITE VISIT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Components of Program Quality	Program meets criterion to an exemplary extent 1	2	Basically meets quality criterion, could be improved 3	4	Does not meet quality criterion, inadequate 5	Mean
II. PARENT EDUCATION (Continued)						
5. Parents who participate in center-based programs will have opportunities to learn and grow.	18.2%	63.3%	18.2%	0%	0%	2.00 (N=22)*
6. Home visits are carefully planned to meet specific parent/child needs.	18.2%	45.5%	27.3%	9.1%	0%	2.27 (N=11)*

*This figure represents the number of sites in which this criterion was observed. In some sites not all criteria could be observed during a particular site visit.

TABLE 2 Continued
CQE EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM

SITE VISIT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Components of Program Quality	Program meets criterion to an exemplary extent		Basically meets quality criterion, could be improved		Does not meet quality criterion, inadequate	Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
III. CHILD-CENTERED ACTIVITIES						
1. Child development activities and experiences are directed and structured so as to promote child development and build child interest, whether in the center or in the child's home.	26.1%	43.5%	30.4%	0%	0%	2.04 (N=22)
2. Learning materials and activities for children are appropriate to child's developmental level, needs and interests, whether in the center or in the child's home.	30.4%	43.5%	26.1%	0%	0%	1.96 (N=22)
3. Parents participate in selecting materials and activities for children, whether in the center or at home.	0%	21.4%	71.4%	7.1%	0%	2.64 (N=14)
4. Center-based child development activities should reflect the importance of the parent and home environment.	4.5%	27.3%	54.5%	13.6%	0%	2.77 (N=22)
5. The center environment is interesting and stimulating to children.	23.8%	47.6%	28.6%	0%	0%	2.04 (N=23)

TABLE 2 Continued

CDE EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM

SITE VISIT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Components of Program Quality	Program meets criterion to an exemplary extent		Basically meets quality criterion, could be improved		Does not meet quality criterion, inadequate	Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
IV. PROGRAM OPERATIONS ENVIRONMENT, STAFF AND ORGANIZATION						
1. The atmosphere and environment of the program is attractive, inviting, and personal for parents and children.	21.7%	26.1%	34.8%	17.4%	0%	2.48 (N=23)*
2. Professional staff members are competent family educators.	17.4%	65.2%	8.7%	8.7%	0%	2.22 (N=23)*
3. Staff work together well, form a congruent and integrated professional group.	27.3%	54.5%	13.6%	4.5%	0%	2.05 (N=22)
4. The program is well-organized.	20.8%	66.7%	12.5%	0%	0%	1.92 (N=23)*
5. Library materials are integrated into other program components.	4.5%	68.2%	22.7%	4.5%	0%	2.27 (N=22)

Table 3

Overview Summary of the
Patterns in Table 2

There are twenty-one criteria. On eleven of the twenty-one criteria, every program observed basically met the quality criterion; for an additional five criteria, only one program observed fell somewhat below the basic level of quality; on three criteria, two observed programs were below the basic quality standard; on the two remaining criteria, three and four programs respectively were judged to be below the basic desired level of quality.

	Components of Program Quality
(1) All programs judged as at least basically meeting the quality criterion on the following criteria:	I-1, I-3, I-5, II-2, II-3, II-5, III-1, III-2, III-5, IV-4
(2) One program judged below basic quality criterion on the following criteria:	II-4, II-6, III-3, IV-3, IV-5
(3) Two programs judged below basic quality criterion on the following criteria:	I-2, I-4, IV-2
(4) Three programs judged below basic quality on this criterion:	III-4
(5) Four programs judged below basic quality on this criterion:	IV-1

Table 4

Rank Order of Highest Quality Criteria
by Mean Scores*

Criterion	Mean Score	Percentage Rating "Exemplary Quality"
1. Parents are positively reinforced to affirm and enhance their positive feelings about themselves and their parent role.	1.77	32%
2. The early childhood family education program is coordinated with other community services and resources.	1.78	30%
3. The program will nurture and enhance the family system by emphasizing and providing opportunities for personal growth and on-going adult development.	1.82	32%
4. The program is well-organized.	1.92	21%
5. Learning materials and activities for children are appropriate to child's development level, needs and interests, whether in the center or in the child's home.	1.96	30%
6. Parents who participate in center-based programs will have opportunities to learn and grow.	2.00	18%

*The means are computed using the following scale:

Program meets criterion to an exemplary extent		Basically meets quality criterion, could be improved		Does not meet quality criterion, inadequate
1	2	3	4	5

Thus, the lower the mean, the higher the overall quality rating.

*In using this scale, the raters treated it as an ordinal scale, much like a grade point average. The computed means are meant only to be indicative and illustrative of overall patterns. Other parametic uses of these data might be inappropriate.

Table 5

Rank Order of Lowest Quality Criteria
by Mean Scores*

Criterion	Mean Score	Percentage Rating Below Basic Quality Standard
21. Center-based child development activities should reflect the importance of the parent and home environment.	2.77	14%
20. Parents participate in selecting materials and activities for children, whether in the center or at home.	2.64	7%
19. The atmosphere and environment of the program is attractive, inviting, and personal for parents and children.	2.48	17%
18. The advisory board plays an active decision-making role in program planning, implementation, and development.	2.30	8%
17. Parents are actively involved in program, planning, implementation, and development.	2.30	0%

*The means are computed using the following scale:

Program meets criterion to an exemplary extent		Basically meets quality criterion, could be improved		Does not meet quality criterion, inadequate
1	2	3	4	5

Thus, the lower the mean, the higher the overall quality rating.

*In using this scale, the raters treated it as an ordinal scale, much like a grade point average. The computed means are meant only to be indicative and illustrative of overall patterns. Other parametic uses of these data might be inappropriate.

PARENT EDUCATION COMPONENT

Parent education is the core of the CQE concept, and in our observations of programs, it seemed clear that the overall quality of program was integrally connected to the soundness of this core. In high quality CQE programs, parent education is the base on which all else rests and from which all other activity flows. The parent is the primary client. The parent's role as the child's primary educator is supported by program staff in a multitude of ways. Staffs take considerable care to develop and keep an integrated educational and supportive family focus. This goes beyond the basic content of the parent education program to the myriad of cues that are present in any program, cues which indicate what the program is really about (name tags ready with names spelled correctly, activities and materials specifically selected for members of an individual group, allocation of space, welcoming touches, etc.). These cues create an overall environment that reaches out and enfolds parents as they walk in the door. The basic message is that parents are important people, and early childhood and family education is an important endeavor.

The primary task of this evaluation is to study the quality of program implementation. The degree to which programs are implemented in accordance with original intent and overall goals is a key quality issue. The evaluation literature suggests that a large proportion of programs fail at the implementation stage. Often the original legislative intent becomes a facade behind which staff do whatever they please. In this case, the intent of the Legislature and CQE is clear: "The programs are designed to emphasize parent and family education and not to provide primary child-care services."*

* Statement of purpose quoted from the official CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs brochure, "Beginnings," October, 1978.

There are a number of ways in which this intent might fail to be realized. Given the current demand for child-care and daycare services, it would be relatively easy for these programs to offer a token bit of parent education and a lot of child-care, particularly if local staff are primarily trained in pre-school activities. Or again, parents might resist education efforts aimed at them and, in the face of such resistance, local staff might re-direct their efforts to impact primarily on the children. These are only two of many possible diversionary motifs. We provide these examples to illustrate what we are looking for in studying the degree to which CQE programs are implemented in accordance with original legislative intent and primary program goals, i.e., the degree to which programs are primarily parent-focused.

We provide these examples of how other programs sometimes depart from their initial program designs to underscore the exemplary nature of CQE program implementation in most local sites. In 19 of the 22 programs, parent education is clearly the primary focus of program activity. In these programs, the child-centered component is a means of accomplishing the parent education objective. The primary target of these programs is the parent; the basic thrust of program activities is parent education and involvement.

In three programs, there seemed to be some departure from the primary focus on parent education. These three programs appeared to be somewhat more child-centered than parent-centered. In feedback to these programs and to state CQE staff, the issue of client focus was discussed at length. These programs reaffirmed that their long-range goals primarily revolve around a broad view of parent/family education, even though much of the current program seemed child-centered.

Those programs which, for a variety of reasons, do not keep parent education in a central position, tend to "scatter their force" and fragment

their services. Otherwise excellent components within these programs operate in limbo when the basic premise is breached. Compromises which were meant to be temporary expedients on the way to developing a core parent program seem extremely difficult to change. Once a program is child-centered, for example, all of its activities carry an implicit message that the basic "client" is the child. This does not necessarily lead naturally to the evolution of a family program.

For almost all CQE programs, however, there is clear focus on parents and family education as primary thrusts of the program. The most important mechanism for educating parents is some form of parent group activity at the program center. The other major method of reaching parents is home visitation, wherein program staff go to the home for one-to-one interaction. (Home visits will be discussed in the next section.) There is considerable variation in the details of how center-based parent education is implemented in the different sites. For example, one site has a relatively formal fourteen week course for parents; when they sign up for the sequence, parents are asked to make a strong commitment to attend regularly and only parents who participate in parent education can avail themselves of other program services like the materials library, children's activities, or health screening. Other programs have year-long discussion groups that meet at regularly scheduled times but are available on a "come-if-you-want-to" basis; parents are not asked to make a commitment to be present for discussions. Some sites place more emphasis on formal presentations of information; other sites emphasize open-ended parent discussion groups. Some programs structure time for parents and children to be together as part of the parent education program; at other locations, the parent classes are entirely separate from children's activities. Several sites offer combinations of most or all of these approaches.

The content of the parent education program is largely determined by the wishes of the participants; there are, of course, many variations in philosophy, approach, balance of parent- and educator-initiated topics, etc. Both informational and support models stress the program's role in helping parents learn about all the options there are, and sometimes enabling parents to use them. No program, including those with pre-established curricula, sets itself up as a source of ultimate wisdom.

There was a great deal of variation among programs in emphasis, structure, and direction, and an abundance of additional offerings in the way of respite, recreation, stimulation, and the learning of observation skills. Development of positive self-concept was an abiding theme, as was the importance of modeling by parent (and child) educators.

We found that there were usually four major elements within the parent education component: child development information, support of parents in their child-rearing function, study of parenting theory, and support of individual (and family) development in program participants. Most programs offered more than one element and many offered all four. We found that the programs which most successfully combined all of the elements (and linked them to the children's program whenever practicable) were those which rated highest on the attainment of the quality ideals.

The detailed observation which follows exemplifies the parent educator's use of the combination of child development theory, child-rearing support, parenting theory, and support of individual and family development.

A Detailed Parent Education Example

The parent educator notes that people had mentioned a lot of behavioral problems on interest surveys. She says that she usually gets into behavior later in the series, but thought it would be appropriate to start now. She suggests a topic for today, "Anger, Parents Own Anger."

She notes that last week the parents had talked about the holidays and the frustrations of taking their kids shopping, so she feels this would be fitting to discuss now. Parents laugh.

The parent educator has the group break into pairs for 5-10 minutes to discuss with each other the times when they get angry, "since it may be hard to get into it right off the top of your heads."

Comments in the pairs included: "I hate taking them to the mall."

"I just keep it inside and then I explode..."
"I smacked him once, I was so mad..."
"I guess if you're gonna say no, you have to stick to your guns..."

After 10 minutes, the parent educator reads a quote: "Both parents and children need to know that expression of anger is not a sign of battle that must lead to defeat" (from the book Sometimes I'm Angry, Teanager Foundation) and says, "I think that the way that most of us were socialized, some of us may not have learned how to handle our anger well."

She asks parents to share with the larger group some of their concerns. There is a long pause. Then one parent says that one thing which frustrates her most is her children's fighting.

A parent asks what kinds of things they fight about.

The parent educator asks how the fights are resolved.

One of the parents remembers fighting with her brother and shares the way it was resolved.

The parent who began the discussion asks if the sibling rivarly ever reversed to where they took care of each other.

One says "I can remember my mother standing there saying: 'what am I going to do with you?' "

Another parent shares her memory of fighting and notes, in response to one parent who described how one child would manipulate to get the other in trouble, that in her family "it didn't matter who started it, both got it."

The parent educator interjected "So it didn't pay off to instigate there."

She answers, "No it doesn't matter who starts it in my house, I give it to both of them." The parent who had talked about manipulating takes pause at the parent educator's comment and appears to reflect on that point. One parent recalls how her mom would say, "If you would just quit bickering, you'd get the job done."

"And you never understood..," adds another, "...until now."

Parent educator--, "Well, we've broken down a lot of myths: One is they fight if they're of the same sex; another is if they are close in age."

She then asks "Did anyone have parents who ignored the fighting?" and comments briefly on Dreikur's theory.

Some parents describe how their parents ignored everything except physical fighting and others describe parents jumping in. One notes that "Mom would just keep hollering and it didn't matter but Dad... Dad would never raise his voice, but you could really tell when he got angry and we'd stop immediately."

Parent educator asks parents to identify what it is that makes them angry.

A parent asks if maybe fighting was partly character building, suggests that those who really fought, whose parents let them, seem more able to take care of themselves today. "In our family, it was always squelched." She notes that she gets hurt easily by feeling rejected in social situations.

Another parent connects this to her experience with her child in that her child responds in an opposite way. She discusses how the child will do things that she doesn't want her to do or won't do things she does, and says, "That's what makes me angry--her independence."

The parent educator says, "What I hear you saying is it's a clash of wills in many ways, your wanting them to do one thing and their wanting to do another."

The parents discuss this and then one notes how she has a lot more patience with other parents' kids.

Parent: "You want them to be the perfect ideal of what you thought they would be before they were born and they're not."

Parent educator: "Do you think that maybe you're saying you have unrealistic expectations?"

Several parents nod their heads reflectively. One says, "Don't you think we're trying to prove to our parents we can do it just a little better...?"

Parent: "I'm trying to prove it to my husband, I can be a good mother."

The parent educator comments that "more than any other job, motherhood has our egos involved in it."

One parent describes how if the kids are good, her husband says they are ours and if they're bad, they are hers.

Two parents discuss relationships with husbands and non-cooperation on disciplining the children. The mother says: "I think that's what gets me the most angry, the most upset. He comes home tired, it's hard to teach high school now, here we are, home sweet home, and the kids are fighting..."

Parent educator: "Do any of you find yourselves taking anger out on the kids that belongs someplace else?" She suggests anger with husbands, etc., and adds, when several parents say yes, "which means we must be sending some mixed messages to our kids; when we're ok they can do just about anything, but when we're not, we get mad at just about anything."

A parent says, "70-80% of the time when I'm mad at the kids, I'm really mad at my husband."

They discuss this briefly and the parent educator asks if they get angry when they feel rushed.

One parent responds, "Mostly when I feel bad about myself."

Parent educator: "So it's not only that we have high expectations for them, but also for ourselves.

Here the educator and parents begin refining when it is they get the most angry. The discussion continues on examples of children doing things in front of other people.

Parent educator: "Who is it that it really matters around and who doesn't it matter around?"

Responses include: "Those parents who have really got it together," "Husbands' boss," "In-laws," "own parents," etc. Parents discuss examples. The parent educator notes that children are good at zeroing in: "This is somebody who likes me; this is somebody who is ill at ease with me."

The parents discuss examples with "grandma and grandpa" at length, observing that when the grandparents' expectations of the children are inappropriate that the children act up. Then the parent educator notes that the times is up and says, "Next week we'll talk about how to handle our anger, now that we've identified how it works...also we're at the point where we're teaching our kids how to handle their anger, but maybe we ought to get the horse before the cart..."

The session ends and parents stay around looking at toy information and books for another 5-10 minutes.

MAINTAINING THE FAMILY FOCUS

Parent education is still an emerging discipline; every person engaged in it is also engaged in the development of a "practice" and an art. The most creative of the parent educators we observed were very much aware of this and were serious about the significance of their work and excited about its potentialities.

The CQE programs avoid many of the usual hazards in parent education programming. Parent education services attached to children's programs traditionally have difficulty getting and keeping parent involvement and/or takers for parent education activities, usually because of the clear child client message. In most CQE programs, children's activities are offered in conjunction with activities for parents. In some programs, staff members function as both parent and child educators and thus have daily direct exposure to the needs of both parents and children. In all successful programs, there is constant close communication between the parent and child educators which keeps the child educators family-focused and prevents erosion of the basic model by staff members whose function is other than that of parent educator per se. The staff members who see themselves as "parent/child educators" or "family educators", no matter what their specific role may be in the program, keep a strong family support focus and are not easily led down any garden paths by even the most beguiling child or the parent who presents himself as a sacrifice on the altar of professional expertise. Because CQE staffs do it so well and apparently so smoothly and effortlessly, it would be easy to get the impression that family education is a clear and easy task. On the contrary, the observable product is the result of never-ending hard work, constant

self-evaluation, and probably daily reaffirmation of their commitment to the task. The hazards do not go away; the success of CQE parent education is a testimonial to staff commitment and refusal to be "led astray".

A new minor hazard may be developing in the burgeoning of parent support activities connected with program operation. The combination of budget cuts and the kind of "institutionalization" which may take place when programs have been established long enough to acquire many ardent devotees, has produced some parent groups which take responsibility for many essentially peripheral program activities: planning special events, preparing food, contributing materials, etc. The hazard in this otherwise laudable parent involvement lies in the possibility of confusion and diffusion of the program's basic purpose. It may be that the prize cookiemaker or party organizer might better be doing her own thing elsewhere or that parents may use the peripheral activities actually to avoid involvement in the basic parent education activities. The question is probably one of how to harness the devotion and energy in ways which will contribute most to both the participants and to the program. It seems to be time to take a good hard look at this phenomenon and check out its meaning and direction.

Parent Education Summary

While the preceeding section on parent education raise some questions about a few specific activities and program sites, the overall conclusion of the site visit team is that the CQE programs are exemplars of high quality family education. It is unusual to find programs where implementation is of such consistently high quality in accordance with basic legislative intent. Helping parents become better teachers of their children is the core of the CQE Early Childhood and Family Education concept. Our observations affirm that the basic parent education core has moved beyond the concept phase into high quality implementation.

PROGRAM COMPONENT FOR CHILDREN

In each of the CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs, there exists an early childhood component. For the most part, this component is considered supplemental to the parent education component.

The majority of children's activity sessions are organized around age groupings. The range of these groups usually depends on the needs of families participating in the program. The sessions are mainly free play and independent activity. A snack time is included and there are some large group activities for the older pre-kindergarten children. The sessions are organized and structured so as to promote free exploring, experiencing, learning, and enjoying. Also, most programs felt they were providing opportunities for social and emotional growth. Awareness and acceptance of self and others was an objective for many programs, along with developing and enhancing the child's self concept.

Following is an example of a children's activity session which is typical of what happens in the children's component of CQE programs.

> The children's activity session is located in a non-functioning elementary school. A colorful bulletin board is to the right when first entering the room. Photographs of children, their families, and a fall scene decorate the walls. Windows border the room along the east side. On another wall is a blackboard with the alphabet and a clothesline for hanging artwork. Children have ice cream buckets and hooks where they can put their belongings. The room is tiled, with one corner carpeted. In this area, large motor activities, games, stuffed animals, storybooks, and floor toys are set out. A mat is also nearby with a large plastic climbing cube. Nearby are the dramatic play areas, a science table and sand table. Two long rectangular tables are also set up at the other end of the room. One is at a lower height more suitable and safe for the younger children. Games and puzzles are set out at these tables. Music is playing from a record player.
>
> Ten children attend this session. Mothers and children arrive at about 9 AM. After parents and teacher talk for a short

time, the parents go to their parent discussion group down the hall. Two staff people are in the room and siblings are also in the same room for this first half. Children seem to handle the separation situation with ease and only one child cries for a short time. Children are very active in the room and have a variety of experiences. They are free to choose any activity they wish. The carpeted area has the most activity. Children can easily move around and materials are displayed in an accessible way.

One teacher is on the floor with the children. At various times she reads to them, or talks and plays with them. She also explains how some games work or helps children if they seem to need it. The other teacher sits at a table and works with children on puzzles and small motor activities. She gives them encouragement and guidance while they play. Many activities are unstructured, so children are able to play and experience on their own. Most of the children play by themselves, and there is little conversation. Staff do interact and talk often with children. Children are encouraged to try new activities, but the choice is theirs and teachers accept their decisions.

About 10:30 A.M., the staff start cleaning up and putting toys away. The children continue to play, while staff clean where children are not active. The teacher then leaves to go to the parent discussion group and the children are left on their own, while the assistant cleans up and prepares tables for snacks. The children play for a short time and then the assistant teacher tells them it's almost time for their mothers to return and that they should clean up. The children do help and when they are done, the mothers have not yet returned. Some start to play again and others wander around the room.

About 10:46, parents and teachers return. Together they sit on the floor in a circle and sing songs and do fingerplays. After this short group time, they have a snack. It is someone's birthday and they have brought a jello birthday pie. They light the candles and everyone sings "Happy Birthday." Parents and children sit together at the table and eat their jello pie and talk about how it tastes and how it was made.

After snack, special activities are set out that parents and their children can do together. A marching game like musical chairs, a trampoline set up in front of a tall mirror, a "Do As I Do" game, small brush painting, a sorting game, and a matching pairs game were set up. This time is specifically for parents and their children to interact together. The siblings have gone to the sibling care room and the teacher is a facilitator. On this particular day, the time for parents and children was shortened by the longer than usual birthday snack. After the short interaction time, parents and children prepare to leave.

Generalizations About The Child Component

The example above is typical of the activities and organization of a center-based children's program. There are, however, important variations among programs. Some programs have no parent-child interaction time; other programs have only parent-child time. Some small programs have a wide age range in center-based children's activities. One program provides some drop-off care for children during times when parent sessions are not being conducted. Another program is relatively heavily focused on children's activities, while more direct parent education activities are only poorly developed. In general, however, high quality activities and materials are provided to children as a supplement to the parent program. Some other generalizations can be made from observations of children's activities.

Staff throughout the State showed considerable skill, knowledge and experience in arranging and setting up the environment so as to reach their objectives. The amount of planning and organizing for each session's activities was sufficient and in most cases, a schedule or "rough" lesson plan was posted as a guide for both parents and staff. Activities were planned according to the ages of the children involved, e.g., some skill development activities were typically planned for older children. For the most part, however, the children's activities are organized in such a way that they require little or no teacher direction. There was much attention and energy given also to planning activities in the center which could be easily and inexpensively replicated at home.

In relating to children and parents, staff were warm, friendly, encouraging and accepting. During actual sessions, staff spent much time interacting and talking with children. They gave much positive reinforcement, yet were also clear in stating rules and limits. Staff also worked well together in

an open, sharing and respectful atmosphere.

The room environments were typically divided into play centers which provided the setting for a variety of stimulating and enjoyable activities. There was variety in the number of centers and also in their definition and boundary. Materials, equipment, and furniture were clean, attractive, intact and in good working condition. In every observation, children were active, involved and appeared to be enjoying the activity session.

There is, of course, a need for care in the planning and presentation of children's materials. How materials are arranged, their accessibility and the amount available at any one time must be carefully monitored. The effectiveness and use of materials and activities is greatly influenced by their arrangement and the spaces provided for them. In general, CQE programs showed consistent sensitivity to these issues.

Parent Roles in the Children's Components

One of the quality criteria emphasizes the desirability of providing an active role for parents in the center-based children's activities. For the most part, however, no formal, direct mechanisms were observed that could provide for parents' participation in selection of materials or in setting up the environment. Questions concerning children's activities were sometimes included in comments from parents gathered as part of local program evaluations. Parents also gave some verbal feedback, but those were the only ways they typically had of having some role in activity and material selection.

Further energy and thought is needed to more effectively involve parents in the structure and operation of the children's sessions. The sessions seemed somewhat separate and independent of the parent education component and the only link was the parent-child interaction time, when that occurred.

HOME-BASED FAMILY EDUCATION

Of the twenty-two CQE programs, nine have regular home-based components and one is beginning implementation of a home base component. Three of these are in urban areas, one is in a suburban area and six are in rural areas. Some other programs have home visits for outreach or for special needs.

In urban areas, the home base component was sometimes seen as a particularly effective way to reach more minority, low income, and single/working parent families, although a wide range of people are served through home visits. In rural areas, staff felt that the home base approach seemed to integrate well into community life. In interviews, rural people commented that building trust was important before people would use the center or group parent education resources. The home visits served to build that trust. Rural program people also noted that there seemed to be a spin-off from home-base to other families in the rural communities, i.e., after home visits, parents shared resources and information with others. In most cases, the home visit was seen as a value in itself, while some staff felt it was an important means for getting parents into the center. A home visit approach which we felt to be exemplary is characterized by this example:

> We arrive at the house, a relatively old single family unit. Inside, the house is clean. We are led to a part of the living-room that is furnished with well-used couches and chairs by one of the two pre-school children who are there with their mother.
>
> The children turn off the TV and both sit in mom's lap. The parent educator begins by explaining to the mother what each of the activities is for today. The first activity emphasizes distinguishing between opposites -- big/small, smooth/sharp, smooth/rough. She begins with the first child (age 22 months) and asks the older one (4 years) to wait for his turn. "OK, now Susan, here we have a big circle and a little circle." She then takes the child through each activity. The older child watches with great interest and intervenes a few times, but both the parent and the home visitor ask him to wait and he does. After each of 3 "opposites" activities, the educator gives the mother some materials with which to make other activities. The home visitor adds a sheet of paper which explains the activity

and its purposes and elaborates on ways to expand the activity.

> She next goes to the second child. He explains that he had gone to the doctor for knee trouble and the doctor had said he needed muscle exercises. She gives mom a paper with an exercise poem on it, which she explains covers a lot of foot and lower body movement and can lead into other exercise games. The child is a little reluctant to begin, so she invites him to jump with her first and then she demonstrates some leg lifts and has the child practice each one.
>
> When she finishes, she thanks the children and invites the parent to an open gym session in the coming week.

In this case, the home visitor directed much attention to the parent throughout the home visit in explaining the activities and offering suggestions on ways to expand them.

In all cases we observed, home visitors were supportive of parents and children. Staff used a variety of educational materials and individualized exceptionally well. Materials and activities were age-appropriate. Activities, for the most part, could be duplicated and expanded in the home by the parent.

Many staff members noted also that the home-based component complemented the center-base especially well. In some cases, they said that parents who would not ordinarily come in to the center were much more likely to join center-based activities after being on home-base. THey also said that parents like the option of home or center activities. This option allowed the different peoples of various neighborhoods and communities to become involved in a way in which they felt comfortable. As one staff member said,

> "The key to parent education is that variety. It should not be for any one group or income level. Whenever you have that variety, you are filling big goals. You are recognizing that people are different, have different needs."

Improving Home Visits

CQE staff in programs with a home visit component were quite articulate in discussing the strengths of home visits and the special impact made possible through one-to-one interaction with a parent in the home setting. The emphasis in interviews was typically focused on the family education potential of home visits. Yet, many of the home visits we actually observed were characterized by a child-centered approach. In most visits, both adults and onlooking siblings directed primary attention to the activities in which the child was involved. The home visitors were openly welcomed by all as if the visit were a very special time of the week, but more often than not, it was viewed as a particularly special time for the child being visited.

Indeed in most cases, home visit staff did not directly discuss parent concerns during the home visit, nor did they provide opportunities for such discussions. Part of this has to do with the child-centered focus of the visits. Children seemed to expect that it was their time and staff did not encourage parents to talk about the children or their personal concerns about parenting while the children were present.

For example, in one visit the parent said that when her child did not do what she asked, the child would become stubborn. This, the parent said, was frustrating for her as a parent. The home visitor did not respond to the mother's comment.

In few cases, did home visitors explain the relationship between the activities brought for children and the reasons for choosing those activities with respect to the child's development. In some cases, it seemed to us, parent and home visitor interaction must have taken place either around a staff checklist often used to monitor the child's development, or an informal discussion of the child's needs. Few

of the home visits we observed, however, had direct communications between parent and home visitor about the activities for children, their purpose, and the parent's own experiences.

Communication with the parent was often through "modeling" and discussing what the child was doing. One of the primary concerns program staff expressed about doing home-based parent education was fear that parents might feel they were being told how to raise their kids. Home visit staff saw themselves on uncertain ground since the parents, in one mother's words, "let her (home visitor) come in my house." This perception of staff being on the parent's turf seemed to make many home visit staff cautious about directly dealing with issues of parenting. Thus, the child-focused nature of these home visits reduced the potential for having direct impact on the family as a whole. Parents learned much about their children from such visits, but they learned less about themselves as parents than they might have through a more direct approach.

Summary of Home Visit Observations

Our experience of the home visit component was largely quite positive. As mentioned above, the use of materials, positive support of parents and children, and child-centered education were strong points, reflecting quality staff training and preparation in these areas. Especially noteworthy are the materials, some already developed and some still being developed, which emphasize activities that facilitate skill development in cognitive, affective, physical and social areas. These materials are easily used in the home and serve as an excellent starting point for parents to build on.

The one area lacking, in terms of quality criteria, was the parent education in the home. When discussing the child-centered focus of the home based component, many staff members said that parents express their own needs

in terms of their children. However, we observed parent comments which were openings for discussing parenting practices. These openings were seldom taken advantage of or pursued. Such lost opportunities seem especially serious in those cases where parents were not also participating in center-based parent education.

Our recommendation is for staff to continue to operate with all due sensitivity to the individuals and families who invite them into their homes, yet be clear from the beginning that they have skills and expertise to offer in parenting education as well as child development. Thus, staff should structure the home visits so that parents are provided opportunities to make use of staff expertise.

This is not to suggest that this "go slow" approach to family education in the home is inappropriate. In older programs, staff noted that the "go slow" approach paid off -- once trust was established, parents began to open up more. The suggestion here is a "go slow" approach which makes it clear to the parents that parent-focused resources and expertise are also available. Our observations suggest that many opportunities for explicit discussions of parenting are available. To miss such opportunities because of a concentrated focus on providing child development activities may reduce the long-term impact of the home visit on parents.

SPECIAL EVALUATION ISSUES

The report thus far has presented results of the ratings on quality criteria and discussed patterns in each major program component: center-based parent education, the children's component, and home visits. In the pages which follow, we consider some additional issues that regularly emerged during the site visits.

The issues which emerged as special evaluation concerns are the following:

(1) Key elements in a quality program, i.e., what key ingredients have to come together if a program is to achieve excellence?

(2) Parent-child interaction time, i.e., what is the function, purpose, and potential of parent-child interaction in center-based components?

(3) Program development as related to outreach, parent input, and needs assessment, i.e., how do these program support functions change and develop over time?

(4) Communications patterns, i.e., how and to what extent are CQE programs sharing information, resources, ideas, and problem-solving approaches?

(5) Local program data, i.e., what kinds of information can be and should be collected by individual programs for their own evaluation needs?

Each of these issues will be discussed with special attention to the continuing theme of program quality. These special topics emerged because they relate directly to policies and strategies for improving and further developing CQE programs. Building on these special topics, the report concludes with a series of recommendations that constitute an agenda for discussions about future directions for CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs.

KEY ELEMENTS IN A QUALITY PROGRAM

What makes for a quality program? What key ingredients have to come together if a program is to achieve excellence? The major mandate of this evaluation effort was to examine the extent to which CQE programs were meeting quality ideals. The observations made during the site visits suggest that, in general, the CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs are of high quality. But what makes these programs of such high quality? In speculating on answers to this question, the evaluation team identified several critical elements that seem to be operating in the CQE programs.

Quality of Staff

The major factor in explaining the quality of CQE programs is the quality of the staff who operate the programs. The site visit evaluators were consistently impressed with the characteristics of local program staff. In particular, staff exhibited commitment to and enthusiasm for their programs. In both the discussions of programs and in their actions, it was clear that they care deeply about what they are doing. Moreover, they manifest a strong and constant belief that they have something to offer, and that what they have to offer is important. Out of that belief, joined to their demonstrated ability to operate the program, a strong sense of confidence has emerged. High quality staff make for a high quality program.

The strength and quality of CQE staff cannot be taken for granted. The dependence of the program upon quality staff is also the program's prime area of vulnerability. There is considerable concern among program directors and advisory committee members that the dynamics of hiring staff under conditions of declining school enrollments may lead to problems in attempts to maintain

the current quality of staff. Advisory committee members have an important role to play in selecting appropriate staff for local programs. The staff hiring process should not be a random or routine school process. Both program participants and program staff expressed strong feelings that special characteristics are needed among selected staff if programs are to be of high quality.

Clarity of Purpose

One of the major strengths of the CQE programs is their clarity of purpose. These programs are clearly directed at serving families. The overall goals of the program revolve around issues of improved parenting. Unlike many education and social action programs, there is a minimum of confusion about what to do and why. Indeed, these programs demonstrate a clarity of purpose not only about what to offer, but also what not to offer. That is, program staff made clear statements that they were not offering therapy, nursery school, day care, or social work support. These are family education programs, and that clarity of purpose has served the programs well.

Staff Colleagueship

A third major factor in program quality is the degree to which there is consensus among staff about program content and processes. The site visit evaluators had many opportunities to observe staff in local programs working together. Of particular note, was the extent to which the various components of the program, e.g., the parent education component, the child component, and the home-based component were integrated together. It would be easy for separate components to become quite isolated from each other. Only rarely was such isolation observed. The clarity of purpose about family education, and the clarity of purpose about the supplementary role of other services,

have helped facilitate the integration of separate components into a smoothly operating whole.

Sensitivity to Local Conditions

A fourth important element that contributes to the high quality of these programs is the extent to which program staff demonstrate sensitivity to the local conditions they experience. Such sensitivity goes beyond conducting needs assessments or coordinating services with other social action programs. There is a delicate balance here between leadership and followship. A quality program does not respond simply and blindly to whatever local people may indicate they want upon first contact with the program. Rather, a quality program combines sensitivity to local needs with leadership that provides a direction for improving local conditions. The CQE programs are testimony to the fact that local people will respond to programs of high quality as word-of-mouth gets around that the program is sensitive, while at the same time providing a positive direction for the future of the community.

Additional Factors Affecting Program Quality

It is clear from interviews with school officials, advisory committee members, and parents that the local CQE programs have generated considerable community support. As community support has emerged in local communities, it has become one of the strengths contributing to the high quality of these programs.

Another important factor in understanding the effectiveness of CQE programs is the extent to which staff have taken seriously their responsibility to integrate their services with the efforts of other community organizations. Coordination takes a great deal of time and effort. The observations suggest

that local staff have taken seriously their responsibilities for integration and coordination on a community-wide basis.

One final strength, a strength that is fundamental to all of the other factors mentioned, is program autonomy. Time after time during interviews the respondents expressed their belief that it was important that local programs be able to develop in their own ways. While the Minnesota Council on Quality Education provides basic guidelines for the operation of programs, the day-to-day content and processes of these programs are determined by local people to meet the needs of families in local communities. It is also clear that program autonomy is not an easy thing to maintain. In a number of cases, there are clear and present threats to local program autonomy. In the delicate political balance of local and state politics, and in the complex web of school and non-school contingencies, program autonomy can appear quite vulnerable.

A closely related threat to program quality is the uncertainty faced by local programs because of the nature of their funding. Program staff often discuss the difficulty of making long-range plans given the uncertain nature of future funding. It is clear that programs of quality require certain minimal levels of stability and consistency over time. At the same time, in the current political and economic realities, CQE programs are likely to have to continue to live with uncertainty. Indeed, it is possible that uncertainty has contributed to the quality of CQE programs, in that program staff have not been lulled into the routine of taking the continuation of their program for granted. Thus, the cutting edge of uncertainty may have been an important, if painful, factor contributing to the high quality of CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs.

PARENT-CHILD INTERACTIONS

Parent-child interactions are not a separate CQE component. Moreover, the quality criteria do not include a specific item concerning the desirability of structured parent-child interaction time as a uniformly desirable activity in CQE programs. However, because of the overall CQE focus on family education we feel that there are situations and opportunities for center-based parent-child interaction which could be more fully developed and incorporated into the overall program objectives. It appears that in a natural developmental progression, some programs have put thought and energy into the planning and structuring of a parent-child interaction time. How and why parent child interactions were used varied among the programs that contained it. And sometimes the hows and whys were somewhat unclear.

The most common reason for a parent-child interaction time was to provide an opportunity for parents and children to learn new activities and ideas to try at home. It was also often a way to handle separation problems.

Parent child interactions occurred either at the very beginning or at the end of scheduled center activities. Their amount of time varied, but for the most part they were activity-oriented with parents interacting and spending time with their child. Staff was responsible for setting up the environment and facilitating the interaction.

The following observation describes one program's parent-child interaction time. The session is for the toddler age group and lasted for an hour-and-a-half. In this session, there seems to be a blend of the quality criteria of both the parent education and the early childhood components. Factors which are particular to this session are the age of the children, and the decision by the parents to have the session structured the way it is.

Observation of a Parent-Child Interaction

The session observed is for the 18 month-24 month age group and their parents. Sibling care is also provided in a room next door to this one. Six mothers and their toddlers attend this session. For the first hour, they spend time together in free play. The children's teacher, the director, and parent educator are also in the room.

Eight special activities are set out in different parts of the room. At each activity, is a task card which lists the name, skill and procedure suggestions.

Most of activities are on the floor (except for pudding painting) and parents and staff people along w/children spend most of the time on the floor.

A small tub is set out for water play. This activity is very popular and two toddlers and their mother play w/the water toys to figure out what floats. Pudding painting is set out and two parents and their toddlers start out playing at this table. They talk about how it feels, its color, and its taste. There is a ball throwing game, identifying plastic animals, a large climb thru plastic cube, stacking cups, a sorting colored chips game, story books, and stringing pipe cleaners into a plastic colander. The last activity listed would be one easily done at home. Each special activity has been done by each child at least once. They seem to enjoy them and there is much laughter and conversation between parents and children and also between parents and staff.

This is the third time this group has met together. They seem very comfortable with each other, (both parents and children) and are very friendly. They talk and joke with each other but also spend time interacting closely w/their own child participating in the various activities.

$Mother_1$ -"Jimmy, you're putting the bear by the dog. What does he say?"

Jimmy - "Doggie, kitty?"

$Mother_1$ -"Yes, this is a doggie. Bow-wow."

$Mother_2$ -"You know it took Andrea (her daughter) a while to put the name with the sound. But I have this one book which is so cute and it's all colorful pictures of animals. It's one of her favorites..." and the conversation continues for a short time.

At each activity there is usually only one child and parent playing.

The staff persons model much positive reinforcement and encouragement of children and how materials may be used in different ways. They also give suggestions and point out examples of a particular level of development in the children.

About 9:50, the mothers and parent educator sit around the one art table and start their discussion. On the other side of the room a table is quickly brought in and all the children, siblings included, sit around and have their snack w/children's session staff. Children are free to sit with their mothers if they wish. Two toddlers stay at the table w/their mothers. This situation seems to be okay and everyone seems very comfortable with it.

After snack, the children move to other activities in the room. New materials and activities have been set out that are appropriate for older siblings,along with activities well suited for the toddlers.

There are many materials in the dramatic play corner that are props for much pretending. Both boys and girls enjoy playing in this area. There are dolls of other ethnic groups and children are playing with them. This area is used mainly by older children

One toddler sits on the floor near his mother and is playing with alphabet cubes and a puzzle. Another child is sitting at the table next to his mother playing with a toy cash register. At various times other toddlers return to their mother's side but shortly return to some other activity in other parts of the room.

The parent discussion topic is self esteem and they start out by writing down things that they think affect how their child feels about him/herself. They then are to list five things they really like about their child and two things they don't like. The mothers spend a short time quietly writing. The discussion then begins and parents readily share their feelings and experiences related to the topic. Despite interruptions and noise from the children playing, the parents seem little bothered or inhibited by it.

About 10:20
literature to take home if they wish. Parents and children then prepare to leave. Staff are there to help out, answer questions or bring up concerns that they may have.

Expanding the Use of Parent-Child Interaction Times

Many factors are involved in facilitating quality sessions for parent-child interaction. The needs of the parents should determine the discussion topics. How the discussion groups are structured plays a major role in planning and programming parent-child interactions. Also the needs and ages of children, time, physical space and topics of discussion may not always be appropriate for such a session.

We are not suggesting that every program have the same type of parent/child interaction. What we are suggesting, based on our observations, is that more careful consideration be given to furthering the goals of early childhood/family education programs through further development and greater use of parent-child interactions.

Basically, we're suggesting that parent-child interaction times be given careful consideration. In some programs, the parent and child are cast in the role of learners and the teacher as teacher, rather than the two adults (parent and staff member) functioning together as teachers to the child. In general, the parent-child interaction times seem to be inadequately utilized; most sessions concentrated on specific children's activities.

Although it would require a great deal of creative planning and knowledge of the developmental status of both child and parent, activities could be presented which would help both parent and child work on basic developmental tasks. Separation issues, for example, could be dealt with experientially instead of "handled" and talked about. Particularly for those programs which are well-established, refining and strengthening the parent-child interaction could present a developmental challenge to the staff which might result in strengthening the program and also be an important contribution to the field of parent education.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT: OUTREACH AND PARENT INPUT

CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs change over time. Programs in their first year of operation face different problems and different constraints from programs in their third or fourth year of operation. The opportunity to visit and review programs at different stages of development made it possible to construct an overview of program developmental processes. In particular, this section of the report will review the implications of program development over time for outreach and parent input.

The 22 CQE programs vary considerably in years of operation and experience. The table below shows the distribution of programs of different ages.

Number of Years of Operation Under CQE	Number of Programs in This Category
Fifth year of operation	5
Fourth year of operation	7
Third year of operation	1
Second year of operation	9

This table also shows how the CQE program has grown during the last five years. This growth has particular implications for outreach efforts and parent input into ongoing programs. Outreach is concerned with the question of who comes to the program, i.e., to what extent are programs operating at capacity, and to what extent are program participants representative of the populations from which participants are drawn? The question of parent input is particularly important because it concerns how decisions are made about what the program will do and ways in which resources are used.

Outreach Efforts

CQE programs use a variety of methods to reach their target populations: newsletters, telephone contacts to prospective participants, door-to-door

contacts through canvassing or surveys, newspaper articles, radio announcements, informational sheets sent out from local schools or other organizations, and referrals from community organizations and agencies. Many programs have quite extensive outreach efforts. Despite these organized outreach efforts, the staff in every program visited reported that the most effective mechanism for outreach is word-of-mouth from participants. Thus, informal networks in local communities have been found to be the most effective means of program outreach.

One important measure of the effectiveness of outreach is the extent to which programs are operating at capacity. All fourth and fifth year programs reported that they were operating at capacity, and many of them said that they have waiting lists of participants who want to get into the program. At the same time, many of these same programs are continuing to engage in extensive outreach efforts. While extensive, formal outreach efforts may be critical during the first two years of a program's life, the extent to which resources ought to be used for general awareness, wide dissemination, or blanket outreach efforts after that time should be carefully reviewed. In the judgment of the site visit evaluators, several programs were continuing extensive outreach efforts beyond the point at which such efforts were needed or useful. This meant that scarce program resources were being used to generate a demand that already existed.

One reason extensive outreach efforts may continue beyond the point they are needed is that a great deal of program energy goes into the organizing of outreach efforts during the first two years of program life. Once such outreach efforts have been organized, they can become routine. It may then be difficult to break that routine in the later years of program life, when the extensive outreach efforts are not needed to the same extent.

The site visit evaluation team recommends that local programs review their outreach activities to see if extensive outreach is still needed, particularly in programs that are operating at capacity with waiting lists.

A second issue that emerges with regard to continued outreach efforts concerns the problem of reaching special target populations. Virtually all programs reported difficulty in reaching single parent families. Many programs are also experiencing difficulty in efforts to involve parents from lower socio-economic groups and/or parents from minority groups. All programs also reported that they would like to be able to reach fathers more effectively. Interviews with advisory committee members and parent participants indicated that one of the strengths of the CQE program is that it is available to a broad range of community people. Thus, these interview respondents strongly urge that CQE not become a program aimed primarily at special groups. At the same time, program staff, school officials, advisory committee members, and parent participants want their programs to be representative of the social-demographic characteristics of their local communities. The problem is how to reach these special populations and, once reached, how to make space for them in programs already operating at capacity. While there is no simple solution to these problems, it may be possible to enlarge the service capacity of programs by making greater use of parent participant resources. In the next section, this possibility is explored in some depth.

Changing Parent Input

The primary target population for CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs is families. The program, as described earlier in this report under the parent education section, provides a critical educational function and service to participating parents. Parent input is primarily solicited in

terms of the content of the program, i.e., topics for discussions, information parents would like to receive, scheduling preferences, and basic curriculum outlines. Providing opportunities for parents to make suggestions of this kind makes it possible for programs to be responsive to parent needs and interests. This type of input from parents is particularly appropriate during the first two years of a program's life. However, over time, the potential for parents to play a larger role in the program may make it possible for the very nature of parent input to undergo a fundamental change.

The issue here is how to use parents who have already participated in the program to serve other parents who are just coming into the program. The site visit evaluators observed very little activity in this area. In some cases, the same group of parents has been participating in the program for as long as three years. These same programs have waiting lists of parents who want to get into the program. After three years of participation, it may well be possible, indeed desirable, for parents to take greater responsibility for continuing their parenting education and sharing without the continued use of scarce staff resources. Indeed, such long-term groups may have become overly dependent upon program staff so that their continued growth is actually inhibited by their reliance upon continued staff direction. Staff resources might be much more effectively used if directed at serving new parents rather than continuing to serve the same group of parents over a long period of time.

A second way of involving these experienced parents to a greater extent is to give them greater responsibility in working with new parents. In particular, it may be possible to use experienced parents who have demonstrated their knowledge, sensitivity, and ability to interrelate with other parents for home visits. A number of program staff reported that they believe that home visits are extremely effective in reaching special populations, e.g.,

single parent families, mothers with several young children who find it difficult to get to the center, and parents who live far away and have transportation problems. It may be possible to train parents who have participated over time in the center-based program in how to share their parenting expertise through home visits. This would enhance considerably the outreach capability and the service capability of programs.

In a similar manner, it may be possible to use experienced parents with particular talents and expertise to lead parent groups in the center so that, again, scarce staff resources can be freed to concentrate upon parents with particular needs. For example, it might be possible for third and fourth year parents to take greater responsibility for second year parents while the staff concentrate on working with new parents in the program.

There are other roles that parents can play in the program to ease the burden on staff and the difficulty of scarce resources. Parents could take greater responsibility for program newsletters. In some instances the site visit team felt that program staff were spending an inordinate amount of time producing a highly polished newsletter. Part of the justification for this was outreach, although the program was already operating at capacity, with a waiting list, and with parents who had been participating in the program for a long period of time. If parents were given greater responsibility for producing the newsletter, in consultation with program staff, this would free staff resources to concentrate more fully on program operations. Such a parent-produced newsletter might also have greater credibility and greater sensitivity to the specific desires and interests of local parents.

In effect, as programs develop over time , the ways in which parents can be used to facilitate program operations change. Parents who have already gone through the program constitute a major untapped resource in most programs.

Over time, it is possible that the staff role would be increasingly directed at facilitating parents who provide direct services to other parents rather than staff providing those direct services themselves. Such a change would fundamentally alter the nature of outreach, the breadth of program service, and the role of program staff. In the judgment of the site visit team, such changes would make CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs more cost-effective and extend their impact in the community. In addition, such changes would permit better delivery of services to parents with special needs through more intensive needs assessment procedures. This last point is taken up in the next section.

Needs Assessment

Needs assessment has become a popular and widely used technique for making programs responsive to local participants and local conditions. Two kinds of needs assessment have dominated the CQE programs. First, there have been needs assessments which involve looking at basic census data and secondary data sources in local communities to determine the characteristics of the target population. A second type of needs assessment involves the use of interest inventories, questionnaires, and related techniques for finding out from parent participants what they would like to have in the program. Thus, the first type of needs assessment is related to outreach efforts and the second type of needs assessment is related to parent input into program content. These two kinds of needs assessment are particularly appropriate in the early years of a program's life when the program is establishing credibility in the community, learning how to be responsive to local needs, and building a basic program approach to Early Childhood and Family Education.

Over time, however, it may be possible for program staff to become more sophisticated about needs assessment. Such sophistication would come from

using a clinical approach to needs assessment -- clinical in the sense that the individual needs of individual parents are assessed through in-depth interaction with particular parents. The home visit comes closest to this approach, where an individual staff member and an individual parent have the opportunity to interact around the needs in that particular situation. Yet, as noted in the description and analysis of the home visits, relatively little assessment of parent needs have been made during home visits because the home visit focuses so much upon the needs of the children. If parents who are experienced in programs took on more of the routine activities of program operations, it would be possible for program staff to spend greater amounts of time working with individual parents on special parenting needs. This is not a recommendation that program staff become counselors or therapists. Rather, it is a recognition, expressed by most program staff, that they would like to find ways to better individualize their programs. Such individualization can only come through more intensive interaction with individual parents. This means that mechanisms must be found to permit individual staff to interact with individual parents. Such interactions would not replace parent groups; rather, such individual interactions would complement and enhance the functioning of parent groups.

Some programs already provide for individual parent conferences. The purpose of these conferences, however, was often not very clear and the ability of staff to find time to fully use such conferences was severely constrained. Greater individualization of parent education efforts may well mean a review of the entire program system and a reallocation of staff resources along the lines suggested in the previous two sections. In any case, in the judgment of the site visit team, the next step in the evolution of CQE

Early Childhood and Family Education programs should be towards greater individualization of parenting education to better meet the diverse and complex needs of parents in general, and particularly of parents from special groups with special needs.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Communication--between programs, and between programs and administration--is not always easy in a far-flung statewide program. CQE, on the whole, seems to handle this very well. We had some direct experience with how it works on a couple of occasions when program directors were unhappy about things that were done--or left undone--on site visits. They called the CQE assistant coordinator, who called the director of MCSR, who called us. It was clear that program directors had immediate access to their administrative staff and that they expected--and received--not only support but also some action. This kind of immediate, straightforward, and direct handling seemed to be typical, within individual staffs as well as between programs and State administration.

Many people expressed a wish for more opportunity to meet with other local staff members to discuss their common concerns, the evolution of their programs, and sometimes their small but important discoveries about techniques which smooth program operation. There was a clear wish to spend more in-service time on the basic topic of parent education.

Program directors in some of the small rural programs seem to have a genuine problem, expressed or unexpressed, with professional isolation. This would seem to require some additional input in order to provide opportunities for the kind of continuous professional interchange which is taken for granted in metropolitan and suburban programs. Perhaps the staff of each of the isolated programs could be directly attached to one specified program for in-service training to enable continuous communication to lend not only support, but stimulation and "professional dialogue." This "buddy system" might both tap the enormous resources of well-established programs in a natural developmental way and be more economical

than added direct involvement by the CQE administrative staff with each isolated program.

The idea of a "retreat" kept occurring to us as we became privy through the site visits , to the innermost concerns, wishes, and needs of staff in the twenty-two programs. The opportunity to spend some solid time together for mutual learning and support is a strong need and want. We also found that many individual programs could well use retreats of their own--that staffs need to stop their endless activity and think about what they're doing in greater depth than the usual staff meeting permits. This is in no way a criticism; the "endless activity" is almost always the provision of excellent program. But the very devotion, attention to detail, and individualization which make CQE programs what they are , also keeps staff very much immersed in ongoing program activities. What seems to us necessary is some built-in structure for getting heads above water so that staff can look, both inward and outward, at what they are doing, and what other people both in and out of CQE are doing, in terms of their goals and their capacity to meet them.

Sharing Strengths

Having had the opportunity to directly observe the twenty-two programs, we are impressed with the knowledge, skills, and creativity that reside in the various programs. Different programs have different strengths. Each individual program's strength is a potential resource to help other staffs in their efforts to improve their own particular program. Yet, few formal opportunities exist for real sharing of ideas, approaches, knowledge, and techniques across programs.

On special topics and issues of general concern--outreach, home visits, parent discussion group facilitation, reaching special target populations,

curriculum planning--there are exemplary programs. The expertise and experience of exemplary programs ought to be available for the enrichment of all programs. Yet, from discussions with local program staffs, it is clear that programs seldom use each other as resources. Program staff repeatedly requested more opportunities for inter-program sharing. Such sharing of resources is a major developmental need.

Related Issues

Two other issues that relate broadly to communications emerged during many site visits. One issue concerns program staffing, particularly equity issues. The other issue was a concern about program size.

Issues raised about staff qualifications, salaries, and hiring procedures took many forms. Many programs feel they have "lucked out" with staff who are hired (or "bumped") via external channels. Although we recognize the constraints in the system, "lucking out" does not seem a good enough basis for the staffing of programs whose quality greatly depends on the quality of staff. Integrity and autonomy of program, as well as the close communication and mutual trust necessary among staff members, are breached when programs do not luck out. Salary discrepancies are sometimes serious and affect staff functioning. In general, qualifications and salaries for aides, and sometimes for secretaries and other support staff, do not "fit" with the general high qualification standards and competitive salaries of Early Childhood and Family Education personnel.

Size of program was another recurring concern; some staff members felt that they were already on the edge of being stretched too thin. To have the kind of relationships they want to have with both parents and children, and to maintain a climate of personal, warm support may only be possible if the number of participants is limited to whatever number parent and child

educators feel able to encompass comfortably.

Optimism About Solutions

While this section on program development and communications has focused on some of the problems facing CQE programs, almost without exception, every kind of problem voiced during interviews was expressed in terms of the assumption that solutions could be found. There was a uniform positive expectation that the CQE administration shared local programs' concerns and would work toward solutions. It seemed clear that not only directors of programs but all local staff felt both supported and positively challenged by the CQE State administration. There was a marked absence of petty gripes and, overall, a kind of mature acceptance of what is and is not possible. In short, the CQE programs are characterized by optimism, energy, and action.

COLLECTING DATA ON LOCAL PROGRAMS

Many of the programs we visited expressed a need to collect information on what they are doing and what effect it has on the people they serve. Common statements include:

> The kinds of changes we see taking place are not easily documented -- people's own growth -- besides parents' own testimony.... It's hard to quantify something that's not quantifiable...
>
> The problem is that none of us has a way of measuring... quantitatively how well we do. We can look at attendance...

A couple of the programs had begun to put creative energy into exploring ways of collecting more systematic information. For example, one program has developed a parent evaluation questionnaire which is especially effective in soliciting specific comments from parents on their experience in the program. Some of the questions are:

- What were your expectations when you began the group?
- In what way were your expectations met/not met?
- Did you ever share or refer to handouts out of class?
- In what way, if any, have you been able to examine your values and expectations?

These questions are asked in written or oral interviews.

Another program is beginning to look at the question of how pre-school education has affected the child's performance in the school, by attempting to identify which of the various programs in the community the child attended and to correlate that information with diagnostic and developmental assessments of the children. Kindergarten teachers are a source of information that has not been fully tapped by most programs.

CQE programs might benefit from looking at some of the more refined instruments and strategies that programs have already developed. They should focus on collecting information they have at their fingertips rather than being too concerned about measuring unquantifiable outcomes and thereby

not collecting systematic information on anything. Programs could document participant responses to the program, i.e., instead of simply noting whether the program was effective, ask them to detail how the program has affected them. An additional suggestion is that parents be utilized more fully in the data collection process.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This overview report of the site visit evaluations for the CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs has attempted to provide a basic perspective on the patterns that cut across programs. Our purpose has been to paint an aggregate picture of the total CQE effort. Thus, the narrative in this report contains many generalizations about typical activities and recurring issues.

Such an overview can never do justice to the individual qualities of the twenty-two distinct CQE programs. While this report focuses on patterns that cut across programs, the most important pattern of all may be that each program is unique. Variations in program processes and content have emerged across the state of Minnesota as different staffs have responded to varying local conditions and needs.

The purpose of this evaluation effort was to observe CQE programs and make judgments about the quality of those programs. The first part of this report presented the results of those judgments. The overall quality of CQE programs is quite high. Twenty-one quality criteria were examined in each program. For eleven of the twenty-one quality criteria, all programs observed were judged to meet the basic level of quality. For an additional five criteria, only one program in each case was judged to be below the basic quality standards. No quality standard had fewer than 83 percent of all programs judged as meeting the basic quality standard for that criterion. In brief, these results indicate that the programs are attaining high levels of quality.

The generally high quality of individual programs presented particular problems for the site visit team in attempting to provide useful feedback to local program staff. In attempting to provide suggestions about ways of

dealing with particular problems a program might be considering, we had a recurring problem in suddenly finding that we were assuming that staff members knew how much we respected their efforts and how much we judged their programs to be of high quality. Having made the assumption that they would know that our overall judgment was positive, we often moved directly to what were minor flaws in otherwise exemplary programs. Yet, we felt able to direct our feedback at these relatively minor issues because we were so profoundly respectful of the overall quality of the programs and of the CQE administrative staff. Indeed, the high-level quality that characterized programs gave us the incentive to react particularly strongly when we encountered parts of programs that were operating below the quality standards.

The recommendations which follow are an attempt to provide a balanced view about the strengths and weaknesses of the CQE program. The recommendations are really of two kinds. First, we review again the strengths of the program by way of conducting an assets analysis so that CQE staff and participants can be sure that in attempting to improve programs they don't lose sight of the core strengths that make these programs high quality endeavors. The remainder of the recommendations concern specific areas in which program quality can be enhanced.

Recommendations

1. CQE administration, staff, advisory committees, and participants should take special care in the on-going development of program plans to maintain focus on the central strengths of the CQE approach to Early Childhood and Family Education: a clear focus on family education; a clear focus on parents as the primary targets of program activities; the maintenance of knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and committed staff; sensitivity to local needs and interests while maintaining a delicate balance between leadership and followship; and coordination with other community service organizations.

2. The role of parent advisory committees needs to be continually examined so that they are active and relevant. Advisory committees should focus in particular on ways of supporting program autonomy, building consistency and stability into program activities, and maintaining high quality program staff.

3. Home visits need to be carefully examined to determine if the frequent focus on children has reduced the impact, or potential impact, of home visits on parents.

4. Outreach efforts need to be examined to determine if they have become overly routine and unproductive in programs that are operating at capacity. In particular, older programs need to examine their outreach efforts with regard to special populations and the amount of program resources being devoted to outreach.

5. The programs were generally characterized as having relatively low levels of meaningful parent input into the content and processes of the programs. We especially urge older programs who have worked with certain parents for several years to examine ways in which those parents might play more productive roles in program activities. Experienced parents can be used for outreach efforts, for home visits, to assist in children's activities, and even to lead and facilitate parent discussion groups.

6. Needs assessment has been defined relatively narrowly in many programs. Needs assessment has focused mainly on census data and interest questionnaires distributed to participants. A more clinical approach to needs assessment that provides for greater individualization of parent education might increase the impact of staff efforts.

7. There is a need to develop strategies to increase communications among programs and to provide more opportunities for program directors and other program staff to come together to reflect on what they are doing and to share information about how to do things better. Much of this sharing could revolve around the special strengths of particular programs which excel in certain areas like home visits, outreach, curriculum planning, etc.

8. Closely related to the preceding point is the need to reduce the isolation of professional staff in small rural programs. Efforts in this direction may particularly require the leadership of CQE staff in the State office.

9. The quality of evaluation data being collected by and for local programs shows great variation. Many programs are collecting no data at all. Local programs need encouragement and direction with regard to the importance of and methods for conducting local program evaluations.

These recommendations are offered as an agenda for discussion as the future of CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs is deliberated. It is important to note that these recommendations do not simply focus on isolated features of the CQE program. Rather, each recommendation has implications for other aspects of the program not specifically mentioned in that particular recommendation. The activities and processes of CQE programs constitute a system, a whole, such that to change any one part of a program is likely to have serious implications for other parts of the program. Thus, these recommendations should not be dealt with piecemeal but should be viewed in the total context of the overall purpose and direction of the CQE Early Childhood and Family Education programs.

Finally, we urge that CQE maintain its focus on high standards of quality. These twenty-two Early Childhood and Family Education programs are testimony to the meaningfulness of the word quality in the name--Council on Quality Education. It is because quality is such an elusive and subjective attribute that it must be vigilantly studied lest we be tempted to take its attainment for granted.